

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 18 January 2022

Present: John Weise (Vice Chair)

Schools Group

L Ayling	E Johnson
H Beamish	M Loftus
M Bellamy	J McDonald
J Bush	M Morris
G Fraser	S Ralph
M Forber	A Ramsden
S Goodwin	R Wood

Non-Schools Group

S Davies	N Prance
G Harris	J Procter
B McGregor	

In

Attendance:

Y Allen	J Levenson
S Ashley	P Price
J Backhouse	S Robinson
H Bedwa	A Snow
Cllr Clements	C Thomson
C Fenlon	F Whiting
K Frost	

Apologies:

H Johnson	C Scott
J Merry	S White
A Norbury	A Whiteley
A Ryecroft	

773 **PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETING**

- This is a public meeting
- The meeting is recorded for minute taking purposes only
- Remain on mute unless requested to speak
- Raise 'hand' to ask a question, or ask a question in the chat section
- Use Chat to vote as not everyone has the hand symbol.

774 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30TH NOVEMBER 2021**

The minutes from the meeting were accepted as a true record.

775 **MATTERS ARISING**

Clarification was requested concerning point 10 of the minutes, School Improvement and Behaviour Support. There were concerns that the breakdown of spending of behaviour support de-delegation did not identify the impact of the spend over the last 12 months. Confirmation was provided that the advert to fill the permanent Behaviour Support post would be sent out before February half term. Further information about exclusions is picked up in the Alternative Provision report on this agenda.

776 ALTERNATIVE PROVISION UPDATE

Jan Levenson updated Forum on the progress of Alternative Provision for Children on Wirral during the 2020-21 academic year:-

- The commissioned provision for excluded pupils is now provided by Progress Schools Ltd., which is proving effective.
- More bespoke arrangements have been developed over the last 12 months to meet the needs of some challenging behaviours.
- The KS3 Re-integration Programme is a flagship model of good practice, with fewer exclusions at KS3. Most re-integrations are proving successful.
- There are concerns that there are a small number of exclusions from special schools where needs cannot be met though Progress schools as this is not their area of expertise.
- Definite downwards trend of excluded pupils over the last few years from 70 to low 20's due to good strategies in all Wirral Schools, including Alternative Education.
- There has been a pilot with Wrap for Primary Alternative Education over the last 12 months. Primary challenges in this area require more investigation as it is a relatively new concept.

It was noted that there has been an impact in this area due to Covid and schools need to be mindful of issues, particularly as it is still early days in the recovery.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

777 ENERGY UPDATE

Andrew Snow updated Forum on the procurement of electricity and gas on behalf of schools through the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). Energy costs have been rising and continue to rise, with gas prices increasing more rapidly. Advice provided by CCS are precautionary, and worst case scenario, is as follows:-

- Increase provision for natural gas supplied by Total by 194%
- Increase provision for electricity supplied by EdF by 70%

The additional cost of purchasing electricity from renewable sources for 2022-23 to enable the council to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 will be met by the Council's Climate Emergency Budget again this year.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

778 **SCHOOL BUDGETS REPORT 2022-23**

Christine Thomson outlined the DSG budget for 2022-23 and a 3 year forecast for information. The budget for 2022-23 totals £316.2m across the DSG blocks, Schools, Central, Early Years and High needs. The budget will be considered for approval by the Policy and Resources Committee.

Supplementary funding will be available for the 2022-23 financial year for the schools and high needs blocks to address additional cost pressures. The supplementary funding for the school block has not been included in the budget as there is currently no indication of how this will be allocated, other than it is additional to the DSG. The high needs supplementary funding has been included in the 2022-23 budget as the inclusion of this in the block funding has been confirmed.

As part of the central block the distribution of the historic costs elements is based on the contributions to combined budgets agreed by Schools Forum for 2021-22 but has been reduced by 10% to reflect the reduction in funding. Funding of the historic element has reduced by 20% but it is proposed that spare capacity from the current costs element is used to mitigate the impact.

The changes to the 2022-23 budget are as follows:-

- The schools block has increased by £7.5m which mainly reflects the increases in the NFF elements
- The high needs block has increased by £8.6m which reflects existing and on-going demand in services and the impact of the High Needs Strategy.
- Early Years block has a reduction of £1.5m to reflect the expected update of 2 and 3&4 year old provision.

In addition to the budget year, a forecast for the three financial years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 has also been prepared to inform planning and to determine the future impact of current decisions. The forecast will not be considered for approval by the Policy and resources Committee.

The Forecast identifies a worsening position for 2022-23 and 2023-24 but then improving from 2024-25 onwards. It is expected that the strategies that are to be adopted will deliver a positive reserve balance by the end of 2026-27.

Resolved

1. Forum views were sought on the Schools Budget for 2022-23

2. Forum agreed the reduced Contribution of Combined budgets for 2022-23 of £0.63m for School improvement, local safeguarding Children's Board, school intervention, PFI support, PFI CLC, Looked After Children Education Services, Business Rates and Governors Forum.
3. The School Budget will be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee on 15th February 2022.

779 DE-DELEGATION OF SERVICES 2022-23

Yaqub Allen informed Forum of the de-delegated services of Contingency, Special Staff Costs made up of maternity/paternity and TU facility time), School Library Service, Insurance, Behaviour Support, School Improvement and former ESG Costs.

The only rate increase for 2022-23 is for Special Staff Costs:-

- Maternity due to increase in costs in this financial year
- TU facilities time to take account of expected pay awards in 2022-23 financial year.

The increased special staff cost rate primary school in 2022-23 will be £31.11 and £38.03 for secondary schools.

Only Schools Forum members, in their relevant phase, can decide if these areas should be taken out of the formula budget before it is allocated to schools.

It was noted that special school do not de-delegate funds from their budget in the same way as maintained primary and secondary schools, they have a buy-back process.

Resolved

1. The Primary Forum Representatives agreed to de-delegate each of the following budgets for the financial year 2022-23:-
 - a. Contingency
 - b. Special Staff Costs including TU Facilities time
 - c. School Library Service
 - d. Insurance
 - e. School Improvement
 - f. Behaviour Support

2. Primary Forum Representatives agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £365,940

3. The Secondary Forum Representative agreed to de-delegate each of the following budgets for the financial year 2022-23:-
 - a. Contingency
 - b. Special Staff Costs including TU Facilities time
 - c. School Improvement
 - d. Behaviour Support

4. Secondary Forum Representative agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £57,920
5. Special Schools Forum Representatives agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £76,140.

780 **SCHOOL BALANCES UPDATE**

Sue Ashley updated Forum on school balances and projections based on Period 6 monitoring. Supplementary funding will be provided in the 2022-23 financial year above DSG, some of which will be offset by additional costs, such as employers NI increase of 1.25%, expected pay awards and utility increases. Overall balances continue to show a downward trend over the next 3 years, and if no action is taken the number of schools moving into deficit will continue to increase. The LA continues to support schools to enable them to make difficult decisions to ensure budgets remain in credit, or they can move back into a credit position.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

781 **WORKPLAN**

The workplan was provided for information. Dates for future meetings are detailed below:-

- An additional meeting on Tuesday 8th March will be added to cover:-
 - Changes to the Monitoring & Brokerage Grant (See AOB below)
 - High Needs Working Group update
- Tuesday 14th June 2022

High Needs Working Group will be held on Tuesday 15th February at 5pm. Members of the group will be invited in due course.

782 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were 2 further points of business.

- DfE have recently published the results of a consultation concerning the future of the Monitoring & Brokerage Grant which is awarded to the councils to ensure school improvement is provided to mainstream schools. DfE have decided that this grant will be phased out, with a deduction of 50% of the grant in 2022-23, with no grant available from 2023-24. The DfE's expectation is that councils can deduct this from maintained school budget to ensure

core school improvement work can continue through delegation. Given the time frame it was not appropriate to bring a paper to this meeting, hence the March meeting.

- There are changes to the administration of the Schools Forum.
 - Hawa Bedwa will be taking over the Finance lead from Christine Thomson
 - The administration of Schools Forum and membership will be split and shared between Democratic services and Schools Statutory role in Finance.